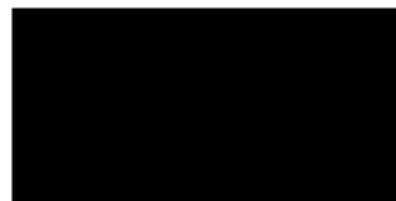




Department
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Wightlink timetabling

Thank you for your letter of 14 November to the Secretary of State for Transport, expressing your concerns at the proposed alteration of early and late ferry services between the Isle of Wight and the mainland. I have been asked to provide a reply.

The issue of the adequacy of ferry service provision, as well as the fairness of its cost, is one which has relatively recently been brought to the attention of the competition authorities. The Office of Fair Trading reported in 2009 that there was nothing to suggest that either service provision or ticket pricing was inadequate or unfair and therefore declined to refer the matter to the Competition Commission (the full report can be accessed via the following link

http://www.offt.gov.uk/shared_offt/consultations/bft1135.pdf)

Any citizen is within his/her rights to direct concerns, regarding the latest service developments, to OFT which might be minded to re-visit its decision if it felt that the situation had indeed materially altered. However, given the fact that there are three providers of cross Solent services, and that Wightlink alone currently operates 230 daily crossings it may be difficult to argue the case that the Isle of Wight citizens have inadequate ferry provision even if some of the unsocial hours services have been curtailed.

There are provisions in European competition law for Public Service Obligations (PSOs) which do allow for subsidies of otherwise unviable ferry services, for example in the more remote Scottish islands. But, with a population of 140,000 the Isle of Wight is clearly a different case.

Yours sincerely,

GERARD MACKAY

